

REMARKS

A. Background

Claims 1-20 were pending in the application at the time of the Office Action. The Office Action objected to the drawings on formal grounds. Claims 1, 4-8, 16 and 18-20 were rejected as being obvious over cited prior art. Claims 2, 3, 9-15, and 17 were either allowed or objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim. By this response applicant has amended the drawings so as to address the formal issue. Applicant has also amended claims 1, 3, and 16; cancelled claims 2 and 17; and added new claims 21-23. As such, claims 1, 3-16, and 18-23 are presented for the Examiner's consideration in light of the following remarks.

B. Proposed Amendments

1. Drawings

Applicant has herein amendment Figure 7 of the drawings to include reference character 64 which identifies the slots providing access to the central pocket 62. Applicant respectfully submits that the amendment to the drawings does not introduce new matter, and entry thereof is respectfully requested.

2. Claims

By this response applicant has amended claim 1 to incorporate limitations of previously pending claim 2 and has amended claim 16 to incorporate limitations of previously pending claim 17. Claim 3 has also been amended to depend directly from claim 1. Applicant has also added new claims 21-23. Applicant respectfully submits that the new claims are supported by original claim 1 and page 11 of the specification as originally filed.

In view of the foregoing, applicant respectfully submits that the amendments to the claims do not introduce new matter, and entry thereof is respectfully requested.

C. Rejection on the Merits

Paragraph 1 of the Office Action objected to the drawings for failing to include reference character 64 as referenced in the specification. By this response applicant has amended Figure 7 to incorporate the missing reference character. As such, applicant respectfully requests that the objection to the drawings be withdrawn.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Office Action rejected claims 1, 4-8, 16 and 18-20 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the U.S. Patent No. 6,105,196 to Chang in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,946,780 to Borchers. Paragraph 5 of the Office Action states that claims 2, 3, and 17 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Applicant has herein amended claim 1 to incorporate the limitations of claim 2. As such, applicant respectfully submits that claim 1 is allowable for the same reasons that claim 2 was considered to be allowable in the Office Action.

Similarly, claim 16 has been amended to incorporate the limitations of claim 17. As such, applicant respectfully submits that claim 16 is allowable for the same reasons that claim 17 was considered to be allowable in the Office Action.

The remaining dependent claims 4-8 and 18-20 depend from either claim 1 or claim 16 and thus incorporate the limitations thereof. As such, applicant respectfully submits that claims 4-8 and 18-20 are allowable for at least the same reasons as discussed above with regard to claims 1 and 16.

Claims 9-15 were considered allowable in the Office Action and thus are not discussed herein.

Applicant also respectfully submits that new claim 21-23 are allowable over the cited prior art. Specifically, neither the Chang nor the Borchers patent disclose or suggest “positioning soap, a toy, or a stuffed animal within the central pocket,” as recited in the claim 21. Furthermore, all structures of the sponge of the Borchers patent and the Chang patent are interconnected. As such, neither the Chang patent nor the Borchers patent either disclose or suggest, wherein the “soap, toy, or stuffed animal is positioned within the central pocket so as to be freely disposed within the central pocket and not connected to the sponge,” as recited in claim 22.

D. Conclusion

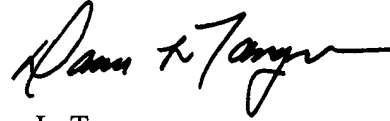
Applicant notes that this response does not discuss every reason why the claims of the present application are distinguished over the cited prior art. Most notably, applicant submits that many if not all of the dependent claims are independently distinguishable over the cited prior art. Applicant has merely submitted those arguments which it considers sufficient to clearly distinguish the claims over the cited prior art.

In view of the foregoing, applicant respectfully requests the Examiner’s reconsideration and allowance of claims 1, 3-16, and 18-23 as amended and presented herein.

In the event there remains any impediment to allowance of the claims which could be clarified in a telephonic interview, the Examiner is respectfully requested to initiate such an interview with the undersigned.

Dated this 6th day of April 2004.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dana L. Tangren", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dana L. Tangren
Attorney for Applicant
Registration No. 37,246
Customer No. 022913

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